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The Role of Religion in the Realization of Vision 2020 in Nigeria

John Arierhi Ottuh, Ph.D
Vicar: Winners Baptist Church,
P.O. Box 1214, Effurun,
Delta State, Nigeria.
Email: wibachef90@yahoo.com
wibachef90@yahoo.com

Abstract

Societal Development was always a welcomed phenomenon in every nation hence theme of development in Nigeria is given its rightful place in national planning. To achieve this all hands must be on desk irrespective of personal interest or affinities. Vision 2020 was a welcomed development in Nigeria today and it has almost become a household song. It was not enough to propose vision 2020, there must be steps to be followed and structures to put on ground to making the vision come to a reality, hence the role of religion becomes very vital in the achievement of this goal. The aim of this study therefore, was to call on all religious adherents and sundry in Nigeria to imbibe the fear of God, the spirit of development and embrace the spirit of peaceful coexistence. Moreover, it was discovered that religion plays a vital role in the moral education of its adherents who eventually constitute the verse majority of the Nigerian society. This study was concluded on the presupposition that vision 2020 in Nigeria can only succeed in a peaceful environment that is full of people with sound minds.

1. Introduction

Ordinarily one may think that religion has nothing to do with vision 2020 in the sense that all that vision 2020 needs are finance, science and management. Nigeria cannot succeed in any millennium development goal without a proper backing of religion. Vision 2020 needs humans to handle it and the verse majority of Nigerians belong to one religion or the other. Nigeria as a nation also needs a peaceful environment to operate any developmental goal. If this is true, religion can be very helpful in this area in Nigeria. Nigerians are very religious and if the religious sphere is able to produce people of sound minds emanating from the fear of God, religious fanatics, religious bigots and social deviants will be curtailed. One example of religious fanaticism and bigotry in Nigeria is the Islamic sect called Boko Haram. This sect has destroyed a lot of human lives and public properties in recent times and this has led to waste of resources. When people imbibe the fear of God in Nigeria corruption, fighting, tribalism, ethno-religious dichotomy, and unpatriotism will give way for developments. At this point one can be relatively sure that whatever that will be built towards the achievement of vision 2020 will not be destroyed or wasted by anyone in the name of religion or whatever name it may be called. The purpose of this paper therefore is to call on all religious adherents and sundry in Nigeria to imbibe the fear of God, the spirit of development and embrace the spirit of peaceful coexistence. When Nigeria gets to this level as a nation vision 2020 will be achieved. To continue, it will be proper to defined some operational terms.

Definition of Terms

Religion: The word religion has many definitions depending on the perspective one is looking at it. According to Smith (1970), religion is man's attempt to achieve the highest possible good by adjusting his life to the strongest and best power in the universe and this power is usually called God. In the opinion of Hick (1994), religion is human recognition of super human controlling power and especially of a personal God or gods entitled to obedience and worship. Also, religion according to Bouquet (1941) is a fixed relationship between the human self and some non-human entity, the sacred, the supernatural, the self existent, the absolute or simply God. All these definitions point to the issue of beliefs. Religion in the context of this paper refers to, Africa Traditional Religion, Islamic Religion and Christianity.

Development: The word development according to Hornby (1963) is an act of causing something to grow larger, fuller or complete. Also, according to the Complete Christian Dictionary for Home, School and Office (1997) it can mean to put something through various stages of production. Development in the context of this paper can be referred to as the roadmap towards the achievements of vision 2020 as a millennium development goal.

2. What is Vision 2020 all about?

By 2020 Nigeria want to become one of the 20 largest economies in the world, able to consolidate its leadership role in Africa and establish itself as a significant player in the global economic and political arena(<http://www.nv2020.org/>). The Concept of Nigeria's economic potential is well recognized. It is the biggest economy in the West African sub region. Giving the country's considerable resource endowment and coastal location there is potential for strong growth. Yet Nigeria has realized very little of this potential. Previous efforts at planning and visioning were not sustained. The history of economic stagnation, declining welfare and social instability, has undermined development for most of the past 30 years. In recent years, Nigeria has been experiencing a growth turnaround and conditions seem right for launching onto a path of sustained and rapid growth, justifying its ranking amongst the 11 countries. These are the countries identified by Goldman Sachs to have the potential for attaining global competitiveness based on their economic and demographic settings and the foundation for reforms already laid. The previous administration had declared the intention to pursue the vision of placing Nigeria among the 20 largest economies in the world by 2020 and the current administration is committed to the attainment of this vision (<http://nv2020bsg.org/aboutus.php>). The Business Support Group is an initiative of the Secretariat of the National Steering Committee of Vision 2020, which is intended to engender Private Sector support for the new vision 2020 process. The Business Support Group is headed by Alhaji (Dr) Umaru Mutallab. The key functions of the Business Support Group is to; Generate Publicity, public opinion and national buy-in; Mobilize Resources from the Private Sector; Organize fund raising activities to support Nigeria vision 2020; and Provide Technical and Financial support. Nigeria would need a whopping sum of 32 trillion naira (if 1 U.S. dollar is 148 naira) of investment if it is to actualize the much talked about Vision 2020, a senior government official has said (<http://nv2020bsg.org/aboutus.php>).

The West African country's minister of National Planning Shamusideen Usman said this at the formal launching of the Vision 2020 document in Abuja on Monday (www.peopledaily.com, June 16,2010). For Nigeria to realize the Vision 2020 and become the 20th largest economy, it must grow at least 9.5% annually within the next eleven years, 2010 included. According to an IMF (2010) report, Nigeria is currently ranked 44th (\$174b {nominal}, 2009) and chasing Belgium which is 20th (\$471b, 2009). Making that jump will require a compounded interest of 298% by 2020 which will translate to 171 percentage growth in the GDP. This analysis assumes that the GDP of the 20th economy will remain constant in 2020. For a nation that has an average of about 5.5% in growth, in the last seven years, it does mean that it needs a new growth engine (www.Fasmicro.com January 30, 2011). Yet, while one can dismiss the bold vision of Nigeria's government, it is important to note that in 1999, the GDP was \$34.8b. A combination of policies and massive ICT investment, the nation moved from 105th position in global GDP ranking to 44th today. Though the ICT market is still one of the fastest growing ones in the world, the FDI has slowed down (www.Fasmicro.com January 30, 2011).

3. The Role of Religion in the Issue of Peace and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria

Almost every aspect of Nigeria life is grabbing with one conflict or the other almost on a daily basis. The Religious aspect of Nigeria is not an exception. In fact most of the crises in Nigeria are religious oriented. According to Umegesi (2010), religious crisis is a term which refers to conflicts between adherents of different religions, like Christians and Muslims; it can equally refer to conflict among members of the same religion, like the maintalsine riot of 1980 and the recent Boko Haram crisis, both being Islamic sectarian religious crisis, which started in Kano and Bauchi respectively. To Umejesi, religious conflict still holds sway today in Nigeria because perpetrators have not been nailed by the rule of law and lessons are bitter in the sense that many lives and properties have been lost, and many have been displaced and have become refugees in their own country. Umejesi further states that religious crises in Nigeria are caused by religious intolerance, political and ethnic manipulation of religion, poverty and above all using the rule of law is the panacea to the persisting violent religious conflicts in Nigeria.

Obasi (2009) opines that rather than using religion to instigate conflict, religious, adherents should use their religion to preach peace and prevent conflicts. Ugwu (2009), using the religious conflicts in Kano and Kaduna states of Nigeria as a case study examined the role religion, ethnicity and sentiments have played to exacerbate religious crisis in Nigeria and as such religions in Nigeria should recline to dialogue instead of violence and uphold the right to worship for all Nigerians. Isiramen (2010) opines that the enlistment of Nigeria into the organization of Islamic countries (OIC) by the military regime of General Babagida Ibrahim in 1986 birthed the struggle for political

supremacy between two major religions (Islam and Christianity) and that the gruesome consequences of the violent struggle between the duo has brought some negative impact on development in Nigeria. In Isiramen's opinion, the lessons from these conflicts show that religious conflict inhibit development, therefore Muslims and Christians in Nigeria must realize that apart from the fact that every Nigerian is a citizen in one nation, every person in Nigeria is also created by God not of his or her religious inclination and as such religious differences should not interfere with the brotherhood of all. Imnekhai (2010) opines that religion can be a mediating structure for politics in Nigeria and the various forms of cankerworms in the political and social life of Nigerian society can be curbed or eliminated if the virtues of religion which include honesty, straightforwardness, servanthood, service and the likes can be observed instead of engaging in unhealthy rivalry. Igboin (2010) notes that there are no dichotomy between religion and politics in Nigeria in the sense that historically Nigerian political parties were formed along ethno – religious divides: NPC in the North, NCNC and AG in the South were form along this thinking. Although scholars such as Wole Soyinka and the likes are of the opinion that religion should be separated from politics, the influence of religion on politics still seems natural in Nigeria, therefore, what is needed is commitment to the rule of law and morality (Igboin, 2010). Ekwue (2006) posits that religion can be disastrous if not well handled and that religion in Nigeria if well practiced can be utilized for unity in Nigeria to inculcate an ethic of “live and let live,” which is more likely to create an atmosphere of co-operation and peaceful co-existence in a religiously pluralistic society like Nigeria. In summary, all the above scholars have approached the issue of conflict and peace in Nigeria from socio-political, economic and religious point of views none has approached it in relation to achieving vision 2020 in Nigeria. This is an aspect this paper wishes to explore.

4. Achieving Vision 2020 in Nigeria: The Part of Religion

To achieve vision 2020 in Nigeria, the different religions in Nigeria have their parts to play in the following ways:

4.1 Promotion of Morality or Moral Values

Religion creates morality in the society through its moral laws. In religion, moral laws are enacted to guide the adherents of such religion. In this regard, Wilde (1916) opines thus:

The concept of law is one of the two concepts which may be taken as fundamental in an ethical system. According as we start from the idea of good to be attained or of a law to be obeyed. We... have a teleological or Jural theory of ethics. The former of this was the characteristics type of Greek theories; the teleological conception of morality is looked upon as fundamentally a matter of self-regarded rules, realization, and its laws are regarded as rules for attainment of a good which every man naturally seeks.

Since the adherents of religions are the same people living in the same society, whatever moral lessons or practices that are being taught by the religion in that society will definitely influence the society in one way or the other. The above idea is not far fetched in Nigeria. Religion can be seen as an agent of moral piety. Christianity for example has always condemned injustice, stealing (robbery), murder, adultery, fornication, cheating, incest, corruption, sabotage and other social vices that are capable of destroying development in Nigeria. The standards of moral conducts are well defined either in a Holy Book or by oral tradition.

There has been a moral breakdown and Nigeria as a society is plagued by bribery and corruption, armed robbery, assassinations, embezzlement of public funds, kidnapping, sexual immoralities, examination malpractices, inter-religious crisis, political manipulations, etc. In President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration, he tried to terminate corruption and some other social vices but not even a community was totally emancipated of corruption or social vices. The police has tried to get rid of robbers from the community but to no avail. As we can see immorality is the disease of the soul and mind which can only be cured by the fear of God. Religion in Nigeria especially Christianity and Islam have always been involved in the preaching of the fear of God. Once the heart and mind are sanitized by moral doctrines, crime will be less in Nigeria. Many of the citizens who have received the gospel for example, have repented from their immoral or deviant lives. Our political leaders and the masses should submit themselves to their religious moral teachings and practices, and then embezzlement of public funds and the practice of other social vices will be reduced to a barest minimum. Adegbola (1983) quoting S. G. Williamson says: “in olden times in Akan society there were no policemen and no need of them; the gods were the policemen.” This shows that if the fear of God is in the heart of the people of Nigeria like that of Akan society which need no policemen, crime

will be reduced to a very large extent in the society. When Nigeria as a nation is free of anarchy, investors will be willing to come in and invest. Therefore, religion such as Christianity and Islam should continue to preach and practice moral values because moral values are the food and drink which keep society alive, healthy and happy.

Nzeako (2006:433-441) also displays an understanding that ethics and ethical values can be applicable for national development in Nigeria in the sense that ethics can be used to fight corruption, individualism and materialism through a wide range of virtues such as righteousness, faithfulness, truthfulness, honesty integrity, modesty, humanity, tolerance, patience, industriousness, self discipline, self-control, justice, patriotism and other virtues, Nzeako (2006: 433-441) furthermore asserts that leadership ethics in Nigeria among other things, should include the following:

- i. leadership position should be assumed with the aim to serve the people and develop the nation, and not to amass wealth far selfish ends;
- ii. every leader should put the welfare of the people and the development of the nation first and above every other consideration;
- iii. every leader should be willing and able to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is half-mark of true leadership;
- iv. the leader must be a person who has the fear of God, who has living conscience and who acts according to good conscience; and
- v. the leader should not be power-drunk; rather, he should be able to know when he and his administration have outlived his welcome and usefulness and he should be willing to allow others to take the leadership through legitimate or legal way.

4.2 Promotion of Peaceful Coexistence among Religious Adherents in Nigeria

Peace is pivotal to the achievement of vision 2020 in Nigeria hence the most conflicting religious adherents (Christians and Muslims) are put into perspective here. One of the things that can help to sustain peaceful coexistence among the duo is the deeper understanding of African brotherhood. The African Concept of Brotherhood can be a meeting point for peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. The concept of brotherhood is not strange to us in Nigeria just that we seemed to throw it behind due to one sentiment or the other. The African people including Nigeria believe in brotherhood. Sometimes inter-tribal and intra-tribal conflicts arise as a result of one problem or the other but deep down in our hearts brotherhood rings louder. One reason why brotherhood is strong in Nigeria is the ties of inter-tribal or inter ethnic marriages going on in Nigeria. Another reason why brotherhood is strong in Nigeria among religious adherents is the inter – marriages going on between different religious adherents in the community. For example in Ogbomoso of Oyo state and Iwo of Osun State in Nigeria, it is very common to see a home made up of Christians and Muslims living together as family due to inter-religious marriages. Sometimes, in Urhobo land, one still see homes where a Christian lives with an African Traditional Religious adherent as husband or wife. This happens mostly when the duo where none Christians before marriage until one of them became a Christian. And being a Christian does not mean that the Christian partner should hate the none Christian partner.

Religious Conflicts arises in Nigeria most especially because we have thrown away the consciousness and spirit of our African brotherhood. Before the advent of Islam and Christianity, we were Africans; how come we became Arabs and Jews overnight? How come we became enemies over religious beliefs? African brotherhood according to Odeh (2006:94) is emphasized by both Islam and Christianity because the duo belief in one ancestral father (Abraham) and one God (The Almighty and Creator of all Mankind). Muslims and Christians can live together in peace if the Spirit of brotherhood exists predominantly in their heart. When this is achieved meaningful development goals like vision 2020 will be realized.

4.3 Promotion of Consolation and Good Counseling

Religion has helped many frustrated people to have consolation. Some religious groups has a socio-welfare programme which involves in good counseling activities. In this regard Omoregbe (1993:301) opines that there would have been many more cases of suicide if religion were not there to provide consolation, meaning and courage to frustrated people who have come to see their lives as meaningless and not worth living. Every society like Nigeria has frustrated people who are even attending the Church or Mosque. Religious bodies have to minister to such people through preaching, teaching, prayers and counseling. Some of such frustrated people who would have been involved

in prostitution, armed robbery, terrorism and other social vices in the community were consoled by religion from doing so. Some times religion even ministers to their physical needs just to prevent them from doing evil to themselves and the community at large. All these strategies will help in the achievement of vision 2020.

4.4 Promotion of Humanitarian Services

It is not enough for religions to preach repentance there is the need to also meet the physical needs of its adherents. Some people indulge in crime due to poverty. The government of the day may not be able to do it all hence religious bodies can take upon themselves as a duty to minister to the poor. Many churches in Nigeria for example have involved itself in humanitarian services by collecting offerings for the less privileged in the society especially those who are orphans and those who need medical care due to one form of accident or other ailments. Some churches have collected offerings to augment school fees for indigent students. As a matter of humanitarian service to the community some religious bodies have set up skill acquisition programme in their premises to help the unemployed people especially the youths to be self-employed. This programme includes computer training, soap making etc. The Muslims also give alms to the less privileged. This is a good practice.

5. Conclusion

From the above discussion, one can observe that religion has its own role to play in the achievement and sustenance of vision 2020 through the promotion of moral values, peace and humanitarian services. The schools, medical institutions and business enterprises set up by some religious bodies have become agents of communal development. The work of nation building should not be left in the hand of government alone. Religious bodies and other well-meaning organizations in Nigeria should also be involved. It is at this level that it will become a collective effort. If Nigeria must achieve vision 2020 religions must make their contributions as well especially the sacrifice of giving peace a chance in Nigeria.

6. Recommendations

In order to achieve vision 2020 in Nigeria the government should do the followings among others:

- i. For Nigeria to succeed with vision 2020 the power sector reform of President Goodluck Jonathan should be intensified to an international standard. This issue should not continue to be on paper it should be brought into reality.
- ii. Security of lives and properties should be taken more seriously in Nigeria. When there is assurance of security and regular power supply many investors will come to Nigeria to invest.
- iii. Employment generation should be a priority in government agendas.
- iv. Information and communication technology should be boosted in Nigeria.
- v. Malfunctional companies in Nigeria like our steel, aluminum, rubber, textile, etc industries should be revamped and duly sold to competent private businessmen to manage adequately.
- vi. Religious as well as political leaders should be proactive in settling issues that have potentials of metamorphosing to provocation and violence before it escalates.
- vii. Religious leaders should organize seminars from time to time to educate their followers on the benefit of peaceful coexistence in the development of Nigeria.

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